



The South India CHURCHMAN

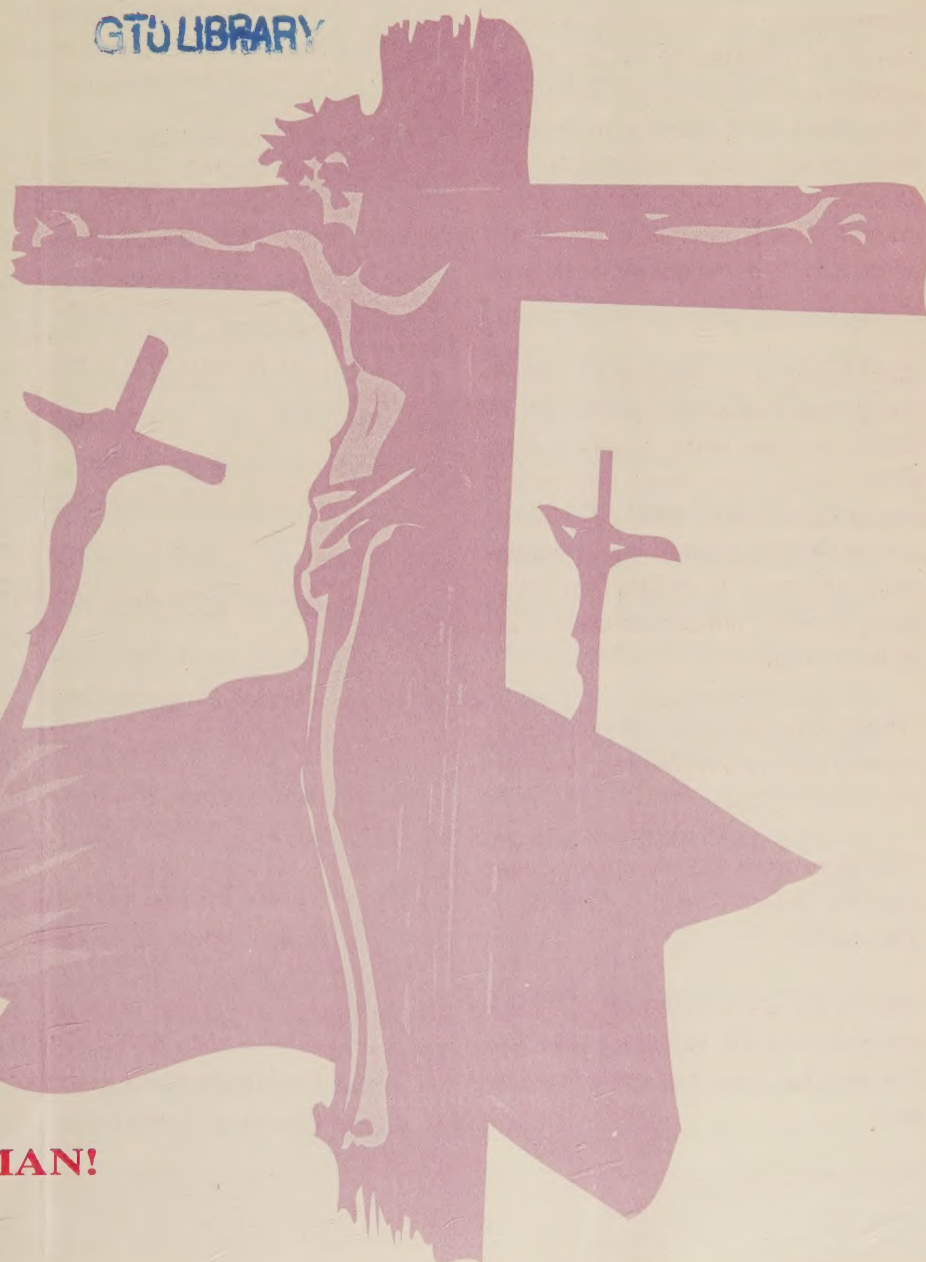
The magazine of the Church of South India

MARCH 1998

PROCESSED

MAY 06 1998

GTU LIBRARY



BEHOLD THE MAN!

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

March 1998

*From Bishop Lesslie
Newbigin's Writings*

"For Christianity the deepest meaning of history lies in the fact that in it God, who is, is wrestling with the estranged and rebellious wills of men, until his own perfect love is embodied and reflected in a redeemed and restored creation.

"There is a real danger lest the question of organic reunion of the churches should be relegated to the position of a distant and unattainable ideal, something which really belongs to the next world but not to this, while all attention should be given to the practical cooperation in study, service, and witness which can be achieved without actual unity."

"Christianity is a changing and developing corpus of belief, practice, association, culture, which is all the time assimilating new views and which needs, therefore, criteria by which it can determine what is true development and what is distorted or enormous growth. We cannot claim finality for christianity."

"There is no knowing without believing and believing is the way to knowing".

"The Mission of God is much greater than the church and is not limited to the church".

"Words are just words, but if they are quickened by the spirit they give life. The words of Jesus are words that give life."

RNI No. 1170/57
Regd. No. M. 597

THE SOUTH INDIA CHURCHMAN

The Magazine of the Church of South India.

MARCH 1998

Editor

Rev. C.V. Theodore
C.S.I. Centre
5, Whites Road,
Royapettah, Chennai-600 014.
Phone: 852 1566/858 9561
Fax : 91-44-852 352 8

Hon. Business Manager

Rev. Govada Dyvasirvadam
General Secretary - CSI
C.S.I. Centre
5, Whites Road,
Royapettah, Chennai-600 014.
Phone: 852 1566

Hon. Agent in U.K.

Rev. R.J. Sleigh,
162, Sweetbrier Lane,
Heavitree, Exeter, Devon EX1 3DG, U.K.
Tel No. (01392) 57692

CONTENTS

A view from the pew	1
A word from your General Secretary	2
The Agony on the Cross	3
Turn to God - Rejoice in Hope	5
Lenten Meditations on the Seven Words of the Cross	7
A brief and Interim Report of the Evaluation Commission of the Church of South India	11

The just concluded general elections have thrown up a fractured verdict. As predicted by opinion polls we have a hung parliament. In the words of Mr. V.P. Singh, the former Prime Minister, it is not only a hung parliament but a 'hanged' parliament. The BJP and its allies have a wafer thin majority of just 'half a member'! What kind of stable government is going to come out of this is anybody's guess. At the moment the BJP is in the saddle; the Congress and the UF have to content themselves with sitting in the opposition benches.

Mr. Seetharam Kesari must be licking his wounds now at leisure. No one really knows why he wanted to destabilise the UF Government. He must have had delusions of being catapulted to power on a sympathy way which was not there. In his foolhardiness he upset the apple cart of the UF government and now he has lost the enormous political clout he had by supporting the government from 'outside'. It was wielding power without accountability! People have to think twice before elevating anyone who is 70 plus to any position of power since he or she is liable to take unsound decisions which may have far reaching conse-

quences as the congress party has learnt to its cost in the recent election. Mr. Kesari has been unceremoniously ejected but the move has come all too late. On the part of the UF it must be said they could have been a little more magnanimous and accommodated the Congress party in the government and that could have perhaps satisfied the power crazy Kesari and his followers and perhaps have

A View from the Pew

saved the UF government. But the reality now is that the BJP is ensconced in the seat of power and the conditions of real politics has made the BJP sober and moderate. The document of governance released by the BJP and its allies is devoid of any ideological overtones and compulsions of BJP. In democracy no party can be an untouchable and there is no room for politics of negativism. We offer our best wishes to the new Prime Minister Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee and we ardently hope he will take India forward to greater heights of peace and prosperity.

* * * * *

We are in the season of Lent. In this season we

meditate on the cross and the sufferings of our Lord. These meditations contribute to our spiritual renewal. During this season Christians also learn to discipline themselves through prayer and fasting. Discipline is always good for all of us.

A certain American river used to do much damage in flood time, tearing down trees, swamping houses, and destroying the crops. At length the Government set to work to provide a remedy. Boats were sent with great dredges to deepen the river bed. An army of men came with spades to cut trenches and straighten the course of the river where it was crooked, and stone banks were built to keep the water from overflowing. So the river was shut in and kept in its course.

It was then that its good work began. The farms bore good crops for they were safe from destruction. The villages were prosperous; and up and down the river came the great boats carried along by its deep and regular current. *It was all the fruit of discipline.*

May the Lenten season be a blessing to us all and discipline us that we too may bear much fruit.

A Word From Your General Secretary

It gives me great pleasure to meet you, members of the CSI through our official magazine, the *South India Churchman*. I deem it my privilege to write these few words as a representative of the CSI elected for a *unique biennium*, the *millennial biennium*, (1998-2000) which is exciting and exhilarating full of glorious opportunities and faith possibilities. As a post-Independence child of India, a faith member of the CSI, belonging to yet another generation, I look at this particular period with optimistic vision; a vision that opens up new vistas of hope, with innumerable and thrilling events in our faith-journey towards the third millennium.

At the fag end of this millennium the CSI begins to feel the absence of great personalities and visionaries like bishop Lesslie Newbigin who gave the church inspiring and a charismatic leadership. The church of the new generation always remembers his commitment for the ministry, his untiring efforts to learn about the culture of India and the Indian life-style and their language (Tamil) with enthusiasm for the expansion of the church. On hearing the news of Bishop Lesslie's death all the staff met at the synod chapel for a service of praise and thanksgiving for the contribution made by him.

The people of the CSI also remember Bishop Seth with grateful hearts for the tremendous spiritual leadership he gave to the people.

We are crossing yet another milestone between the post-jubilee

joy of the church and the event of crossing a 'new Jordan' (i.e.) the year 2000 to reach the promised Canaan, in the 3rd millennium. It is in this context a new team of officers of the synod thinks seriously about invigorating the youth of CSI providing new opportunities towards building a new community in CSI.

For the first time the synod officers with all the directors of councils and departments joined the people of Vellore diocese to conduct retreats for various categories like pastors, laity, teachers, medical workers, sunday school teachers etc. It is here we recognize the great joy on the faces of people participating in the multi-faceted synodical ministries. I am looking forward, with the guidance of the Moderator, the Most Rev. William Moses, to celebrate such 'feasts' in all other dioceses also. I appeal to all members of the church to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all the leaders, ministers and those holding responsible positions in the wholistic ministry of the church towards a fruitful witness in this land.

It was a great blessing to the church when all CSI bishops met for a retreat at Mangalore for a spiritual renewal. These days we have a number of visitors bringing greetings to the CSI, particularly women who came from all over Asia for a consultation at *Vishranthi Nilayam*, Bangalore. In this consultation Rev. Louise Plock, Secretary for Women's Work in EMS and also India Acting Secretary in EMS participated, Dr. Preman Niles, Gen-

eral Secretary, CWM, and his wife, were also here. It was a thrilling event to listen to Dr. Preman Niles in the synod chapel a couple of the weeks ago. Mr. Ad Mook one of Asia Secretaries of the Reformed Church of Netherlands, Mrs. Corintha Van Schaik, his wife, Secretary, Women's Fellowship visited us and presented a boutique with a silver cross perched on a boat embossed on a green back ground from Groningen, Holland as a jubilee gift.

Canon Ivor Smith Cameron from Friends of India, England expressed the great desire of not only the Indians living over there but also those who served India and now living in England, to listen to and relate the ever exciting experiences from the CSI. Rev. Mckenzie one of our former missionaries who served in Madras visited us bringing greetings.

The synod secretariat will soon be computerised with E-mail, Internet and DTP facilities. It means we will be able to serve you more effectively and efficiently. Our magazine *The South India Churchman* could then be done in-house eliminating all delay that has been vexing us all these days. The inordinate delay will all be a thing of the past. Aren't you thrilled about it all? Please do pray for all the initiatives we are taking to modernise our secretariat. We will be able to serve you better.

May the Grace of our Lord be with you all and do uphold me in your prayers. □

THE AGONY ON THE CROSS

WHAT IT COST GOD TO SAVE US!

Bishop Sam Amirtham (Retd.,)

One of the very cruel ways of killing a human being is to fix the body with nails on a wooden cross, two nails piercing the palm of stretched hands and third nail drawn through the anklebones of the legs. The weight of the body is borne by the two nails. The excruciating pain the unquenchable thirst, lying exposed to the scorching sun defy words of description. It is a slow process of death with a long period of agony.

This way of killing a criminal was the inhuman invention of the Roman civilization. The Jewish society had an equally grotesque way of punishing those who disobeyed God's *Torah*, namely death by stoning. Achan, a dishonest warrior and his family were stoned to death by the community of faith. This was the way the Hebrew church cleansed itself of the moral evil in the community (Josh. 7s:24-26). Any one who blasphemed against Yahweh or His *torah* deserved to be killed by stoning (1 K. 21:9-14; Act 7:59).

Even stoning was 'mercy killing' compared to crucifixion. Sometimes the hanging on the cross extended beyond 24 hours. The legs of some of the crucified had to be broken to expedite the dying process. Sometimes, caring bystanders reached a sponge of hyssop to the lips of the dying person which worked as an anesthetic against pain (Mk. 15:36).

The modern "practice" of judicial killing by hanging, or electrocution, suicidal killings by taking cyanide or by becoming human bombs are more sudden, and so less cruel forms of death. The point is that in the more brutal forms of killing, it is not only death itself, but also the extended process of great pain, became part of the punishment.

I am told that in a quiz programme for medical students, the

questions was asked, "what type of death would you wish for your enemy?" "Death by leprosy" was the answer. It is death cell by cell eating away the limbs, slow death over years: "What type of death would you wish for your friend?" "Heart attack". The whole thing is over in a few minutes!

Our Lord hung on the cross for many hours, but he was so emaciated that while the legs of the two robbers had to be broken, he was spared. "But when they came to Jesus, they found that he was already dead. One of the soldiers stabbed his side with a lance, and at once there was a flow of blood and water". (Jn. 19:33,34).

The death of one righteous person can save many non-righteous is the moral spiritual law of the universe (Gen. 18:16-33). The dedicated goodness of one person, a father, a mother, a sister or a brother, we know, brings joy and blessing to the whole family. Similarly the evil deed or an undisciplined life style of one person can bring agony, shame and disgrace to the entire family. The suffering and the daily dying that persons undergo, become in God's mystery of grace, means of change and growth for the good of a family, a village, a diocese, a church, a community, or a whole nation. Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Bishop Desmond Tutu and Mother Teresa are glorious examples of goodness and blessing that come to the whole world in some measure, by their commitment to freedom, human dignity, political rights and caring of the dying, in spite of opposition and at great risk to their own life.

While there is no comparison, the suffering and death of Jesus Christ brought the possibility of salvation to the whole world. It released an empowerment for the

redemption and sanctification of the many.

The death of Jesus Christ is understood in many ways. For example, as a ransom paid to the devil. (Mk. 10:45).

There is a judicial paradigm. Any one who committed a crime, for the sake of moral justice, should receive a punishment. The punishment can also be borne by some one else voluntarily or involuntarily. Some of us may remember what at times happens in a classroom. For a mischief done by a whole class, the teacher may decide to cane the monitor of the class! (Though thankfully this practice has fast disappeared, I remember such an event while I was in the 4th standard, and I was the victim!)

A more adequate paradigm is that of an empowering act, a few inspiration to change the direction and perspective of life. A total about-turn in life's meaning and purpose; not conforming to the world and its value system, but being transformed to the image of Christ through Jesus' life-giving we receive new life (Jn.5:24-26). As the Jesus-grain dies in the earth, a new life, eternal life, flows from that everlasting source of life.

Let us think of another example. If a dog or a cat, a domestic pet does a mischief, say stealing milk or meat, the animal can be changed to better behaviour partly by training, partly by appropriate punishment. It is a rather simple process as the animals live by instinct and this can be altered. But think of a teenager, who demonstrates by brute force his anger at his siblings and revolt against the rules and the conventions of the home. He can be compulsorily forced to abide by the requirements of the domestic rules. If this happens, he will become more discontented and will

be looking for clever manoeuvres to do his own will. But imagine that he sees his mother agonising and crying as he repeatedly discovers on late arrivals at home in the night. There is the possibility that the mother's agony in love would empower him to become a more obedient and loving son. He might restructure his life of his own free will, according to his mother's wishes. Supposing the mother dies in this agony, surely the death of the mother would lead him to a totally transformed life. This is an inadequate illustration, to grasp the mystery of our salvation and the significance of our Lord's agony and death on the cross. We get but a glimpse into the mystery of our Lord's crucifixion and our redemption. The power of transformation in our lives, once we commit ourselves to the crucified Lord is not an unknown experience to many of us. It happens again and again in the circles of our own families and friends, and in the fellowship of our churches.

When we use phrases like "blood of Jesus washes our sin" or "We are saved by grace through faith" it is this experience that we want to proclaim. The grace of enjoying eternal life.

The Gospel is an invitation for a free response. It is never forced upon any one. Like a father who doesn't want to force a kiss from his child, but waits with open hands for the child to run into his arms and kiss him all over his face, God in Jesus waits in the agony of love for us to return to him in our freedom. The cross is the way through which the Lord tells us, I suffered so much for you.. Won't you come into my love, of your own will?

Death of Jesus and his agony are interrelated. In fact, the Nicene creed says, "He was crucified, suffered and was buried". Many young people have asked me why 'he died' is not explicitly stated in the Nicene creed. This is because the Latin word used here comes from the same word as "passion", which

means, suffering and agony, but suffering and agony that leads to death. It atleast makes clear that the passion or the agony our Lord underwent was as serious as death. (Any way, the sentence in the Nicene creed cannot be interpreted in any other way: that He merely suffered, not died!)

Very often during the Good Friday reflections on the seven words from the cross the 4th word, '*Eli, Eli, lama Sabakhthani*' (Mk.15:34) is understood as a cry of desperation. It does express the extreme agony of a dying saviour, undergoing the greatest physical agony, and the painful experience of even forsaken by the Father. This is indeed the truth of the situation. Like any human being he also underwent the agony unto death, worse still, the experience of being forsaken by the Father. The humility of Jesus was as real as any other human person, and this is one of the verses that depicts Jesus' humanhood, clearly and decidedly (Heb. 4:15,16).

We also know that he was quoting scriptures, from the cross (Ps.22:1). As we do, in times of crisis in our lives, repeat some words of the scripture, or sing a few verses of a favourite hymn. But the words of the Psalmist came to Jesus' memory not at the time of "being out of contact with God", when the sense of communion was broken, but after he came through it all victoriously. "Why did you leave me?" is a question in the past tense.

Imagine a father and a child are walking over a river bridge of a single coconut trunk. The father holds the hands of the child. But for an instant the grip slipped and the child was scared to death of falling into the water. Within no time he got back the firm grip of his father. The child then asks, "*appa*, why did you leave me. I am now safely back in your grip". Interpreted in this spirit, '*Eli, Eli*' is not a cry of dereliction but a cry of restored communion with his *Abba* Father. It is not a voice of

hopeless defeat; But the voice of glorious victory.

One more point. The agony of our Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal agony in God's heart. The cross proclaims, the nature of God. God has been, is and always will be, like this, one that knows pain.

In fact, we discover it not only in the cross, but from the beginning of creation from the day God created his first two children, Adam and Eve, in the garden of Eden. When they disobeyed him and wilfully crossed the limits set for them by their creator, His heart must have bled. "Adam, where are you?" are seeking words, and not threatening words, rather agonisingly searching words.

Again after the flood, the Bible says "When the Lord saw that man had done much evil on earth and that his thought and inclinations were always evil, he was sorry that he had made man (human kind) on earth. And he was grieved at heart" (Gen.6:5,6)

Here God complaining through Isaiah, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me" Is. 1:1,2). Can we feel the loving agony in words like "How can I give you up Ephraim? How can I surrender you O, Israel" (Hos. 11:8). You can almost "see tears flowing down the cheek", and hear the "choking voice" of the Father in heaven.

The Book of Revelation has this beautiful description, full of pathos, about Christ: the lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world (8:6). This means, the lamb is an eternally suffering lamb and the fundamental nature of the lamb is "to be killed". God's heart is burdened eternally by His agony for human kind, all of whom have sinned.

The passion week is the annual reminder to the christian church, that the passion of Lord Jesus Christ inspires and enables the believers to participate in His passion, having been saved by His death. □

TURN TO GOD - REJOICE IN HOPE

GNANA ROBINSON*

We are at the beginning of a new year and this new year is significant because it marks the end of a century and also the end of a millennium. We are at the eve of a new century and a new millennium and everywhere people have begun to talk about the preparations for the 21st century and the third millennium.

The year 1998 is particularly significant for the World Council of Churches, because this is its Golden Jubilee Year. Hence the World Council of Churches has announced "Turn to God - Rejoice in Hope" as the theme for the year and also as the theme for its eighth assembly which is to meet in Harare in Zimbabwe in December.

Every Assembly of the World Council of Churches has had its theme in the past and all such themes reflected the context in which the assembly meetings were held. The first assembly was called in Amsterdam in 1948 immediately following the devastation of the second world war and the cold war was just beginning and the theme of the assembly at that time was "Man's Disorder, God's Design". The sixth assembly was held in Vancouver in 1983 and this was the time when people all over the world became conscious of the death-bringing forces of injustice, oppression, exploitation and the environmental destructions and the theme of the assembly that year was "Jesus Christ, the Life of the World".

The theme of the eighth assembly "Turn to God ~ Rejoice in Hope" also thus reflects the context in which we live and it implies our admittance that we, the human community, have gone away from God; we have strayed away from God and we are in the danger of

being destroyed. Hence the call to God, the source of life.

I need not elaborate on the fact that the world of today has turned away from God. There is a crisis of faith. The question raised by Jesus, "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8) becomes pertinent these days. In the face of the achievements in the area of science and technology, many find it difficult to believe in God; many find no relevance in faith in God. Many of those who still hold on to faith have turned their God into Mammon, the God of riches, the God of success, and have turned their religion into a prosperity cult-power, success, health, wealth, prosperity and comfort have become the objects of their faith and in order to achieve these objects they adopt any means, even sacrificing truth, justice and neighbourly love. Individualism and consumerism have become the norms of every one's pursuit and the love towards God and neighbour is no one's concern. Consequently, greed and avarice have taken control of human actions resulting in plundering nature and exhausting and destroying earth's resources that sustain life, with the result that life in this earth itself is threatened. All human values which promote life, foster human community are being eroded that communities which have been living together in peace and harmony are being fragmented and shattered. We have like lost sheep strayed away from God, Hence the call "Turn to God ~ Rejoice in Hope".

This theme involves three elements ~ memory, praxis, which is love in action, and hope ~ and it reminds us of the threefold nature of the Church ~ the Church as a community of memory and interpretation, a community of love in action and a community of hope².

A community of Memory and Interpretation.

The christian community is called to be a community of memory, a community which remembers God's act of love in and through His Son, Jesus Christ, the act of His Salvation. The community of Israel was a community of memory, and they lived in the memory of the great event of God in History, the event of exodus, the deliverance of the people from Egypt, the land of bondage, and their journey into the promised land. "Remember the days of old" (Deut.32:7) was a standing call unto the people of Israel, because the memory of God's act of love in the past enabled the people to remain faithful in their covenant relation with their God.

The christian community, the community of New Israel, is also a community of memory. It is the Eucharistic community, the community which remembers God's act of salvation in Jesus Christ, every time when it partakes in the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ symbolically. The community thus interprets its meaning to the future generation that the memory of God's love is handed down from generation to generation that people of all generations may remain faithful to the God of their salvation, the Covenant God.

But in the course of history, whenever this memory of God's love in action faded, the old Israel, as well as the new Israel strayed away from God. That is perhaps the reason why the memory of the past is brought into the core of the faith of both these communities.

As a community which has strayed away from God, if we have to turn back to God, again memory plays an important role. We have to remember God's love in action on the one hand and recall when, where

* Principal, UTC. Message given at the Term-opening Service at the United Theological College on 07.01.1998

1. Konrad Raiser, *To be the Church*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1997, p.52.

2. *Turn to God - Rejoice in Hope: Bible Studies - Meditations - Liturgical Aids*, WCC Publications 1996, p.ix.

and how we strayed away from God and with which false gods we made our new allegiance.

Turning back to God is part of the prophetic message of the Bible and it involves confession, repentance and turning away from the false gods. Thus, Isaiah says,

"Turn to him from whom you have deeply revolted, O people of Israel. For in that day every one shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold...."

Isaiah 31:6 ~ 7

To Isaiah, God alone is righteous and he alone is able to save people and give them life; that is the reason why people are called to turn to God.

"And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Saviour, there is none besides me. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other"

Isaiah 45:21 ~ 22

The parable of the Prodigal Son illustrates what it means to turn to God. The second son, who revolted against the will of the father and strayed away from him squandering all his wealth, when "he came to himself" (Luke 15:17), looks back to the time he had with the father and remembers his home and the condition of life there, realizes his present predicament and how he has ruined his life by going away from the father and resolves to arise and turn back to his father. He goes with a new resolution, a resolution to confess all his sins and to submit himself totally to the will of the father.

Community of Love in Action

Turning to God involves renouncing all our allegiances to false gods, the forces that separated us from God. The word "arise" in this parable is important. One cannot remain in the state of estrangement and still turn to God. There is no relation between darkness and light, death and life, falsehood and truth, injustice and justice. Turning to God is turning away from darkness to light, from death to life, from falsehood to truth, from injustice to justice. A community of

love in action is a community based on truth and injustice; no community of love in action can be built on falsehood and injustice. Where greed and avarice thrive, power is misused; truth and justice are sacrificed and community life is threatened. As Dr. Konrad Raiser rightly points out ~ "Most of the fundamental ethical codes of the great religions are rooted in the insight that human life in community and in relationship with nature can be sustained only on the basis of an international self-limitation of power and greed."³ "The modern mindset", according to Raiser, "values linear process of growth over cyclical process of generation and regeneration. It shapes the dominant values of individualism and consumerism, competitiveness and accumulation, success and prosperity."⁴

At a time of turning to God, we have to examine what kind of mindset we have and what kind of values we promote. How far do the values we hold contribute to the building up of a community of love, which is the Church, the Body of Christ. St. Paul asks each one to examine and see how one builds upon the foundation that has been laid (I Cor. 3:10).

Every one of us, wherever we are placed, is called to be co-workers of God's action in love, and we are called to be builders of communities of love, communities of reconciliation, and we have to see what contribution, small or great, we make in this common task before us.

Community of Hope

As a community of love in action, we become a community of hope, because our hope is in the God of love, truth and righteousness and this God never fails. The Hebrew word *hesed* in the Old Testament is a profound theological concept which refers to God's faithfulness to his covenant with his people. It is translated as "Covenant love", "steadfast love" or "mercy". God's faithfulness is closely with his righteousness and justice. *The Psalmists rejoice in the "steadfast love" of God, because he is the God of righteousness and justice (Ps. 138:2,8)*

"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne;

Steadfast love and faithfulness go before them" (Ps.89:14).

"Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other" (Ps.85:10).

Because our God, with whom we have reconciled and have entered into a covenant relations, is righteous and just, and because he never fails, our hope for the future is assured and we rejoice in our hope.

History is witness to this fact. Human history has no evidence to prove that falsehood, violence and injustice ever triumphed. The God of life is also the God of love and he will ensure that his children will have life, life abundant, triumphing over all the forces of death. This is our hope in which we rejoice.

The return of the prodigal son to the father was an occasion for rejoicing, merry-making, because that son was dead, but is now alive with the father, he was lost, but is now found. This is the secret of our hope in God, our trust in the faithfulness of God. All those who turn to God will find in him life with contentment and happiness.

Conclusion:

Turn to God - Rejoice in Hope. This call comes to each and every one of us. This is a call for confession, repentance and reconciliation - reconciliation with God and fellow humans - reconciliation among men and women, dalits and non-dalits, rich and poor. This is the Jubilee Year for the churches, the year of restoration - restoration of the freedom and the heritages to the poor and the marginalised, which involves sharing of power, sharing of privileges and sharing of resources. During this New Year, may the Almighty God, grant us his grace and strength to enter into this process of confession, repentance and reconciliation that we may come closer to him and to one another and become a community of love in action rejoicing in our hope. □

3. Konrad Raiser, *Op.cit.*, p.25

4. *Op.Cit.*, p.38

LENTEN MEDITATIONS ON THE SEVEN WORDS OF THE CROSS

- Rev. G. DYVASIRVADAM*

'Father, forgive them'

(i) 'You who had Jesus Christ the crucified placarded before your very eyes.' So Moffatt renders a very striking passage (Gal 3:1). The apostle is using a very vivid metaphor. Then, as now, a common means to attract the attention of the public to an official order was a notice posted up in some prominent position. Our Lord nailed to the cross is likened to a public proclamation. (ii) One who sees such a notice naturally looks for two things. (a) the authority who caused it to be issued, (b) the contents of the message written on it. The Cross of Christ is an announcement of God to the world. It is a declaration of His forgiveness of sinners.

1. GOD'S PARDON.

(i) Our Lord's death is the culmination of His teaching. In parable (e.g. Lk. 17:11 ff), exhortation (Mt. 3:2) and simple declaration (Mk. 2:17) He had announced the great truth that God is one who forgives those who have sinned against Him. Some accepted the message, others questioned His authority or, because of their hard-heartedness, closed their ears to His word. (ii) Our forgiveness of others needs often to be stated by act well as by words. A sincere seeking of reconciliation with those who have wronged us may best be shown by a gift, a helping hand, a friendly gesture. The greatest demonstration of love, Our Lord said, is the offering of our own life on another's behalf (Jn. 15:13). (iii) Consider the Cross in this light. First let us grasp the fact that He who suffered there was sent by God out of pure love (Jn. 3:16); that in fact He was Himself One equal with God (Phil 2:6) who gave Himself voluntarily for us (Jn. 10:18). Shall we not then see in His self-sacrifice the unmistakable declaration of the love of God

- a love that is extended to all who have sinned - that means therefore pardon and peace?

2. MAN'S PENITENCE

(i) Human forgiveness is frequently deficient in one important respect. We declare ourselves ready to forgive, but wait passively for the offender to express his sorrow. The shepherd who lost his sheep and the woman who lost her coin were not content to sit down and do nothing in the hope that the wanderer would return and the missing piece turn up again. The 'happy ending' of these parables is a result of diligent seeking and searching on the part of the owners. (ii) So the Cross of Christ is more than a message. It arouses penitence. Our Lord foretold that His 'lifting up' would draw all men to Him (Jn. 12:32). Let us ask this question: If God did this for me, can I remain aloof? Can I help endeavouring to 'fill up' that which is lacking in the afflictions of Christ' (Col. 1:24) by accepting humbly and gratefully what is offered to me? (iii) Indifference is easy enough. An unpleasant sight which causes the believer mental and physical distress may make us shut our eyes or turn our backs. Most people treat the Crucified Lord in that manner. They just do not think about His sacrifice on Calvary. Even we who have come together this Good Friday may do little better, if there is any taint of formalism in our worship to-day. God grant that we may face the fact of the Cross sincerely and read its message clearly. Then we cannot fail to respond.

(i) Good Friday services are naturally subdued and solemn. The horror of sin is set before us. Sadness is aroused by the fresh realisation of our own guilt and disobedience

which made the Passion of Our Lord necessary. It is a time to mourn. (ii) But our sorrow, while sincere, should be a 'godly sorrow' (II Cor. 7:9). There ought to be nothing dismal or depressing about it. If we have understood afresh the fact of God's forgiveness, and have accepted it once more, our hearts will be full of joy. Let there be therefore a note of thankfulness in all the prayers we say and sing to-day. May we show not only our sorrow but our gratitude by a new dedication of ourselves to Him who as on this day died for us.

THE FIRST WORD

'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

Lk. 23:34.

Forgiveness of our enemies.

1. (a) The Cross was an unprovoked attack upon Our Lord. While He was uncompromising and unyielding in declaring what He knew to be true, and frankly critical of what was base and hypocritical, He bore animosity towards none. (b) Three crowded years of His life had been spent in works of mercy; He came not to condemn but to save the world; His heart's desire was to establish God's Kingdom wherein all might live in brotherhood, justice, peace, and happiness.

2. (a) Yet there were those who hated Him and who at last planned and plotted His death. The only charge they could conjure up against Him was one of blasphemy: even they realised that the alleged claim to be able to destroy the Temple and build it in three days was too transparently ridiculous to be taken seriously (Mt. 26:57-65). (b) With the details of the subsequent course of events we are familiar, the trial before Pilate, and Herod, the people's choice of Barabbas, the horse-play of the soldiery, the scourging,

* General Secretary - CSI. These meditations have been taken from his book 'Silence at the Cross - 1996'

and, at last, the procession to Calvary. All through these proceedings Our Lord had shown wonderful restraint, and maintained a dignified silence. Only as He was nailed to the Cross did He speak, and what a Word! 'Father, forgive them.'

3. (a) Let us realise that Our Lord's teaching about the forgiveness of our enemies (Mt 5:44; 18:21; Rom. 12:20) was not mere ideal to be applauded amid the comfort and security of a peaceful life. It was not in an armchair but on the Cross - as He actually suffered the pain of attack that He prayed, *Father, forgive them.* (b) That is the test. Are we ready to make allowances for and forgive our enemies so long as no harm befalls us; or can we maintain the forgiving spirit when our ships go down, or the bombs fall, and destruction and death are upon us? Can we, like Stephen, cry 'Lay not this sin to their charge' (Acts. 7:60) (c) Yet we ask, did God answer Our Lord's prayer and forgive those who crucified Him, apart from their subsequent penitence? To do so would be, we feel, to condone sin. Perhaps we must distinguish between Divine and human forgiveness. In human quarrels neither side has the monopoly of righteousness; are we to wait for the penitence of our enemies before being willing to forgive, when we need penitence? Apart from reciprocal forgiveness there can be no hope of ultimate and lasting peace among the nations. So we learn from Our Lord's example to pray, very humbly, for our enemies.

THE SECOND WORD

'To-day shall thou be with me in Paradise.' Lk. 23:43

Comforting the dying.

1. (a) Our Lord was not alone. There were three crosses: 'On either side one and Jesus in the midst' (Jn. 19:18). Of the two thieves or malefactors (Mk. 15:27; Lk. 23:32) we know nothing. They may have been

highway robbers (cf. Lk. 10:30) guilty of violence, or political prisoners who, like Barabbas, had committed murder in some 'insurrection' (Lk. 23:19). In any case they were receiving the due reward of their deeds (Lk. 23:41). (b) We often speak of 'the battle of life,' and battle it is. Here are two casualties in the conflict. Without minimising a man's responsibility for his actions, who can say to what extent he is the victim of circumstances like heredity, environment, and chance? Clearly such things must be reckoned with. Why had these two thieves been taken and others left? Why did one, and not the other, repent? Why does one man fall in battle and not another? We cannot unravel the tangled skein of human life.

2. (a) We do not know all that passed between the dying thief and Our Lord. He admitted the justness of his death, and was penitent. Nothing that Our Lord-Himself suffering a like death-could do could rescue him from his cross. But he comforts him with the assurance of His own companionship, human happiness (Jn. 14:3; 17:24). (b) What of those who fall, not in the battle of life, but in the battle of the nations? Can we say that they deserve their fate? Sin there must be somewhere, if there is war; but there is a world of difference between a criminal paying the death penalty and a patriot giving his life for his country. We may be sorry for the former, but we honour the latter.

3. (a) Following Our Lord's example, how can we comfort the dying? There is much devoted nursing and sympathetic medical care to be thankful for where we cannot assist at first-hand we can help by supporting hospitals, Red Cross (notice the 'cross') etc. (b) The ministry of religion can comfort the dying; the unburdening of the conscience, the giving of absolution, the administration of the sacraments, the strengthening of faith in the life of the world to come. (c) Let us remember to pray, in these war

days, for the dying and all who minister to them in body, mind, and spirit.

THE THIRD WORD

'woman, behold thy son.. behold thy mother.' Jn. 19:26-27.

Saving The Home

1. (a) We know so little about the private domestic life of Jesus. Joseph and Mary came from Nazareth and returned from Egypt with the Holy Child (Lk. 2:4; Mt. 2:23). When twelve years old he was taken to Jerusalem and returned to Nazareth and was 'subject unto them' (Lk. 2:51). Eighteen years later He came from Galilee to be baptised of John (Mt. 3:13). Of that home life at Nazareth we are told nothing, but as every home must, it contributed much to the subsequent life and character of Our Lord. (b) We can think of Him as a lover of home. In the last week of His earthly life it was to the home of Martha and Mary and Lazarus at Bethany that He resorted each evening (Mt. 21:17; Jn. 12:1). And he speaks of heaven as a great home with room for all (Jn. 14:2).

2. (a) As He hung upon the Cross He knew that the old home was gone for ever. Would his mother be homeless? Having loved his own unto the end (Jn. 13:1). He knew that he could make demands upon the love of His friends. 'The disciple whom Jesus loved' was to be a son to his mother and she would be a mother to him. From that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. (b) In the midst of his own suffering Our Lord was anxious to save the home the most blessed of human institutions.

THE FOURTH WORD.

'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' Mt. 27:46

The darkness of doubt.

1. (a) It is a familiar metaphor which speaks of knowledge as 'light' and ignorance or doubt as 'dark-

ness'; which speaks of God as dwelling in the light (I Tim. 6:16) and of evil as 'the power of darkness' (Lk. 22:53; Eph. 6:12). (b) The darkness which descended upon Calvary from the sixth unto the ninth hour may have been due to natural causes, but it had a supernatural significance. It stood for the temporary triumph of evil. Hatred, suspicion, pride, which possessed the chief priests and elders, had won the day. Herod and pilate had been made friends (Lk. 23:12) in spite of their different ideologies; an unholy alliance was effected between Church and the hated Roman State. The innocent was trampled down; might was victorious over right. It was the hour of darkness.

2. (a) But this darkness has another significance. It was out of this darkness, and the hush which it brought, that there suddenly came the loud cry, 'My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' We try to probe the meaning of these words on the lips of Our Lord at such a time. (b) All through his life He had been conscious of His Father's presence; He was the Beloved Son (Mk. 1:11; 9:7), and his meat had been to do his father's will in absolute trust. Was this the last great assault of the Tempter who, in the wilderness, had only left him for a season' (Lk. 4:13)? The temptation to doubt. Was Our Lord mistaken in regarding himself as Messiah; had he been doing his father's will or following His own idle dreams; was He self-deluded? Did the cross mean that God was not behind Him; or that evil after all was more powerful than good? To be the deepest abyss of despair.

3. (a) Can our religious faith stand the test of adversity? As we bask in the sunshine of God's love faith has no problems. But if we suffer the loss of our cherished possessions, if disaster falls upon us, bereavement, some terrible affliction, should we still believe in a God of love, or should we curse God and die' (Job 2:9)? Let us be

very gentle with those who lose their faith in God (b) If our Lord did pass through the darkness of doubt we know that it was but a temporary darkness. At the last it was into His Father's hands that He commended His spirit. Faith triumphed and won its reward. (Heb.1:3). Can we resolve that, come what may (and so much is uncertain), we will never despair?

THE FIFTH WORD

"I Thirst" Jn. 19:28

The Relief of Suffering

1. Those who are apt to talk about the cruelties of nature; (as an argument against belief in a good God) should reflect upon the cruelties of man. It seems incredible that men (and 'civilised' men at that) should practise such inhuman atrocities-in war and in peace-as they do upon their fellows. Even in the twentieth century!

2. (a) Man is learning to be humane. When criminals must be executed we try to make death rapid and painless. Crucifixion was a prolonged agony, and our Lord endured this most shameful and excruciating of deaths, the very refinement of cruelty (b) Not least wonderful in the Passion narrative is the fortitude and courage with which He met the death of the Cross. He prayed for His murderers, comforted the dying thief, provided for His Mother, all selfless acts; only in this Fifth Word is there any admission of His own suffering; 'I thirst'. Amid this barbarism 'one ran and took a sponge and filled it with vinegar and gave Him to drink. 'The rest said, 'Let be' (Mt. 7:48). He should like to know the name of that one humane onlooker, and preserve for ever.

3. (a) There is much suffering beyond human control without man adding to the cup. (b) Here is a great call to us to exercise our humanity. In what ways can we offer the sponge of vinegar; for 'inasmuch' as ye have done it unto

one of the least... unto Me' (Mt. 24:40).

THE SIXTH WORD

"It is finished" Jn. 19:30

Winning through

1. (a) Nothing worth while can be accomplished without effort and perseverance. The highway of human life is decked with unfinished towers and the fields disfigured with crooked furrows (Lk.14:29, 9:62). But there are also monuments which testify to the greatness of human achievement. (b) No one ever undertook a greater task than did our Lord, viz. to take away the sin of the world, to save the world (Jn.1:29; 3:17), to establish God's Kingdom, to destroy the works of the devil (1 Jn. 3:8). We have had our Alexanders, Napoleons, their modern counterparts; but Christ's Kingdom was not of this world. It is harder to win souls than to subjugate minds and bodies; to defeat evil than to conquer weak nations.

2. (a) From the outset our Lord's task was not easy; forty days of temptation before He began. His friends mistrusted Him, His disciples were obtuse Mk. 3:21; Mt.15:16) continuous and growing hostility led to rejection, plots and death. (b) perhaps the greatest temptation is to give up in despair. But not even the Cross turned Him from His purpose. (c) So, at the last, He could say 'It is finished'. Not only the agony of crucifixion was over; His work was done, His purpose fulfilled (Jn.12:27) This Word is a cry, not of relief, but of satisfaction.

3. As individuals we must have a clearer perception of life's purpose and steadily pursue our spiritual task year by year. Then when our hour of death comes we may say, not, perhaps, 'It is finished' but atleast it has been moving on towards completion.

THE SEVENTH WORD

'Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.' Lk.23:46

The Peace of Victory

1(a). We often associate peace with the departed. The silent death chamber, the peaceful countenance, suffering over. 'At rest' at peace, we place over the grave (b) So peace stole over Calvary; the railing and jeering ceased, the crowd departed, and all was quiet. There was peace

of mind and spirit for Him who had endured unto the end.

2. (a) Who had won the victory? Our Lord's foes could claim it as they saw His body dead upon the Cross. Could they claim it now if they returned to the world of to-day with its millions of christians? They had but killed the body; there was nothing more they could do (Lk.12:4). (b) Our Lord commended His spirit into His Father's hands; these both were beyond the reach of the enemy; no hatred or strife can disturb the peace of heaven. Not

even death could rob our Lord of victory, for He had fulfilled perfectly His Father's will.

3(a). This Word answers some of our deepest problems. There is in man a spirit which death cannot destroy; there are divine hands into which to commend it. With certainties like these, life's struggles are but a prelude to victory and peace (b) In the light of the Cross of the Resurrection which followed, we have our final assurance of the triumph of righteousness, justice and love. □

TURN TO GOD - HOW?

- Rev Daniel Premkumar*

Text : John 4: 7-14

The meeting of Jesus with the Samaritan woman is presented to us in a beautifully woven and delicately textured narrative by the writer of the fourth Gospel. The text begins with a seemingly non-controversial request by Jesus for a drink of water. However, this leads to the unfolding of the great social and religious divide between the Jews and the Samaritans. Whatmore, this social segregation is further reinforced with a spirituality based on a particular vision of God strengthening these walls of separation between the Jews and the Samaritans. Thus turning to God reduced to a mere *mantra* fortifies the social and religious divide among people and even justifying the divide with elaborate belief systems and intricate ritualism. On the other hand, turning to God with the Messiah involves crossing new frontiers in mission, surely, bridging the social divide (v. 9) and the gender divide (v. 27). Turning to God with the Messiah re-defines foundational issues whereas, turning to God reduced to a mere *mantra* glosses over such matters of deepest concern. Even most of us are tempted

to limit subjects related to the personal dimension only (v. 16) and shy-away from encountering hardest issues. However, there is good news to all those victims of caste and gender divide. They can now rejoice with certain assurance because the Messiah, the Christ is present with them here and now (v. 25). Jesus is raising those very same matters which affect them personally, religiously and socially. Let us as the synod of this great church, the Church of South India turn to God with the Messiah who is ever present with the victims of the gender, religious and social discrimination and ever leading us to the new frontiers in mission. As in the preamble to the evaluation of the CSI points out:

'We recognise different expressions of God's mission primarily in proclamation. Justice is a dimension of the saving act of God, an act of creating and re-creating all our relationships according to the redemptive purposes of God'.

May we as the Church of South India turn to God with the Messiah and thus recognise different expressions of new frontiers in Mission! Amen!

WANTED A HOUSE KEEPER

Should be a graduate between 35-50, married, fluent in English and one more South Indian language besides Tamil with good communicative skills and flair for public relations to manage a 40 room church guest house.

Salary negotiable and commensurate with qualification and experience.

Write to :

**The General Secretary
CSI Centre,
5, Whites Road
Royapettah,
Chennai-600 014.**

giving bio-data and other details.

* Chaplain, Synod 1998, Message given at the Inaugural service of 1998 synod.

A BRIEF AND INTERIM REPORT OF THE EVALUATION COMMISSION OF THE CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA

- Dr. K. C. Abraham *

A commission was appointed by the Executive Committee of the C.S.I. to review the work of the C.S.I. especially its life of unity with the following members Bishop V.P. Dandin, Bishop William Moses Bishop Christopher Furtado, Dr. Amurtha Rao, Dr.V. Devasahayam, Dr. Dhyanchand Carr, Rev. Nirmala Vasantkumar, Rev. Kripaveni Prakash Rao, Dr. George Joseph, Dr.S. Surya Prakash, Rev. Gordon Shaw, Dr.J. Schnellbach, Mr. Fredrick William, Prof. George Koshy and Dr.K.C. Abraham (Convenor).

THE OBJECTIVES

a) to submit a report on the life and work of the Church to the synod, focusing on unity;

b) to prepare a document arising out of the study for discussion and reflection by the congregations asking their suggestions for the implementation of the recommendations of the commission. In other words, it envisages a process of self-reflection in which the whole church is invited to participate.

Areas for Investigation :

The Commission met four times and at its first meeting in January 1997 it decided that the following areas be subjected to its study and evaluation.

a. Unity and Ministry

Worship and liturgy.
Leadership and Episcopacy.
Pastoral ministry.
Elections and Decision-making process.

b. Unity and forces of division :

Denominationalism,
Caste and linguistic difference,
Regionalism and litigation.

c. Unity and Mission

Evangelism, social involvement,
Development, dialogue, healing ministry, and dalit struggle.

d. Unity and laity and youth participation

The nurture programmes, like women's fellowship, youth movements, confirmation classes and Sunday schools.

e. Unity and Administration

Management of finance,
property and institutions

f. Unity and Continuing experience of unity

Joint councils,
relation with partner bodies,
new models of unity
and the concerns of wider ecumenism.

METHODOLOGY

The Commission evolved several different methodologies to assess the above mentioned issues by eliciting honest and reliable feedback from both clergy and laity women and youth.

A fairly comprehensive questionnaire covering important aspects of the life of the church was translated into four regional languages and the respondents selected at random were members of rural, semi-urban and urban congregations. With the help of a social scientist these data are being analysed and some conclusions will be spared in the report although a comprehensive tabulation of data will be used for final report. All the regions are represented in the responses. A majority of the respondents were men above 35 years of age. (61.2%).

Case studies - mainly to have a look at the ministry through our institutions engaged in Education and Training, Development, Health and Healing. Also case studies of:

a. C.S.I. congregations outside U.S.A.

b. Congregations that face problems in their relationship with diocesan administration.

c. Congregations that maintain administrative and episcopal connection with 'parent' diocese e.g. Trivandrum and Madurai.

d. Ecumenical congregations.

Unfortunately, this segment of the study could not be attempted, but our hope is by the time final report is completed, it will be undertaken.

Interviews with selected groups of people, former moderators, bishops, church leaders, theological teachers and friends of C.S.I. overseas.

Consultations : It was felt that attempts be made to organise consultations with youth representatives in various regions. They were conducted in Kerala, and Karnataka. Some of the feedback will be brought into the report.

A consultation of a representative group to reflect on the important concerns was held in October 1997. Papers on mission, women's struggle, dalit concerns, spiritual formation, pastoral ministry, role of educational institutions, healing ministry and a perspective from outside were presented. Findings of this consultations will be incorporated in the report.

AN INTERIM REPORT ONLY

The commission at its October meeting assessed its work and resolved that the Convenor be asked to prepare an interim report for further discussion and present it to the Synod not for action, but to keep abreast of its work and to get a feedback. The report has to be discussed further by the Commission and also it has to complete all the study. Hence, this interim report is presented primarily for information, but also seek general response to it.

A HISTORICAL NOTE

Renewal through self-examination is the very nature of being a church. The C.S.I., from the beginning has engaged in a process of periodic evaluation. Synod meetings contain reports and addresses

* Convenor, CSI Evaluation Commission and Director, SATHRI, Bangalore.

that raise questions for self evaluation and bring out new challenges. The first General Secretary, R.D. Paul, published his own evaluation under the title, the first decade. It contains valuable insights into the positive as well as negative aspects of the life of the church. Renewal and Advance is another attempt to reflect critically on the work of the Church and to express new visions about its future. After thirty years a comprehensive evaluation was conducted by a commission with Prof. M. Abel as its convenor. One may also add, the report of the consultation on Priorities for the Mission of the Church (1982). All these contain a detailed analysis of some of the issues facing the church and its mission. A considerably large number of recommendations which have far-reaching implications were presented to the synod. There had been some discussions about this on the synod level, but a majority of recommendations are yet to be implemented.

These evaluative studies clearly point out two over-riding factors that necessitate evaluation. One is the internal life of the church. The failure to reach the goals set for the church itself.. *Groupism, internal conflicts, electioneering, litigation casteism, other divisive forces* that affect the life and witness of the church give rise to the question, 'Are we faithful to its calling in Christ to give a united witness? 'As you, father, are in me and I in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (Jn. 17-21).

Two external challenges. The church is always mindful of the situation in which it is placed - the questions, problems and new opportunities that confront the church. As we complete fifty years of its life coinciding with the Jubilee of the Nation, we need to pause and ask ourselves has the church fulfilled the task entrusted to it? Are we ready to respond to the challenges of a new century, nay a new mil-

lennium? Developments in economy and media on a global level impinge on us forcing us to rethink the patterns of our relationships and the value systems that have governed us and our mission in the past. To discern in these changes signs of the Spirit and to forge ahead in faith is a task given to us.

The Commission, however, has viewed with great concern that many of the recommendations that have come to us in the previous studies and evaluations remain on paper, at best they have been discussed but seldom have they been implemented. It is the hope of the present Commission that its report will give rise to a process by which all the members of the congregation will participate in it.

Some Observations and highlights

I. a) Worship

Worship is central to the life of the church and it is also a moment that unites people. People participate regularly in worship and the C.S.I. liturgy. Preaching and singing appear to be most helpful elements of C.S.I. Worship. While there is a general appreciation to the liturgy of CSI, a majority of the respondents feel *that more indigenous elements could be added*. It is, however, not clear what specific indigenous elements could be included. It could be *Bhajans, lyrics, Indian instruments or symbols*. This matter has to be discussed further with the congregations. While the C.S.I. liturgy is a unifying factor, its relevance to regional and sectoral realities is a matter to be considered further. Liturgical committee should look further into this matter.

b) Ministry :

Questions were raised and debated over the role of episcopacy in C.S.I. One of the crucial decisions at the time of the formation of united church was to accept episcopacy as an order or mark of the church. There were apprehensions about it, especially by people from the non-episcopal backgrounds. But

going by the responses to the questionnaire and other discussions there is an overwhelming feeling that episcopacy is vital source of church order and a focal point of unity. A majority of respondents want to see the bishops as 'spiritual leaders and as pastors' as not as project holders or managers of institutions.

It is surmised that in actual practice bishops have not lived upto this expectation. They have deviated from the original vision enshrined in the Constitution of C.S.I. Concerns are expressed about bishops spending too much of their time on administration and committees, and also of too much concentration of power in the office. Perception of a sizeable proportion of respondents is that the bishops are out of reach for the congregation and members. How to make a more pastorally oriented bishopric? Can a decentralised style of functioning be possible?

Pastoral ministry is vital to the life of the Church. Questions were asked about people's expectations about pastoral ministry. Top priority is accorded to 'preaching' and 'pastoral visits'. One may consider this as traditional roles of pastors. But it could be the expression of people's hunger for the word and to seek spiritual help and guidance to their day-to-day problems. Again this area should be reflected further. In fact we have not been able to consider the pastor's view about pastoral visits. Are they just social visits? How can they become occasions for counselling? About preaching also there is need for further discussion as to its content and style. In any case one of the questions raised is about the teaching ministry of the church. Should we be satisfied by a 20 minute sermon on Sunday morning?

It is however, doubtful whether the expectations of people about pastoral ministry are fulfilled by the present ministry. Reasons for this should be probed further. Obviously, there is a gap between the expectations and actual fulfilment in the area of pastoral ministry. This gap, perhaps, becomes the breeding

ground for sectarian activities or the reason for mass exodus to some of the para church movements from the main line churches.

Regarding *lay participation*, although adequate in some cases, the general feeling is that *their potential is not fully realised*. Decision making process in the church is centred in the pastor and the Committee. A wider participation of the members in the decision making process is not happening. This could create feeling of being excluded by many people especially the marginal and powerless groups-women, children weaker sections. There is strong feeling by youth that they do not have adequate representations. It was alleged that their representatives are being nominated or they are being elected by the total membership. It is argued that women representatives should be elected by women themselves and youth representatives by youth. Many feel that both these sections should be encouraged to participate fully in the Church.

c) Elections

Elections cannot be avoided but all will agree that division, unpleasantness, conflicts and litigations are associated with them. Moreover, democratic form of election is, perhaps, the only acceptable method. A majority of the respondents suggest that there should be a consensual form of decision-making. But it is difficult to see whether it will solve all the problems associated with present elections. There is a great deal of concern about the divisive consequences of elections on the life of the church. The factors causing divisions in the Church elections are identified as *craze for power and position, caste and personality clashes*. How do we prevent them and make elections free of the evils?

A majority of the respondents suggest that we should have a code of conduct and a machinery to implement it. A vigilant group should be appointed to oversee diocesan elections, especially to the bishopric. It is also suggested that

we create a climate wherein use of money for canvassing and spreading rumours and other unhealthy practices could be eliminated.

II. Unity and Mission

When C.S.I. was formed it was clearly stated in the Constitution :

"It believes that by this union the Church of South India will become more effective instrument for God's work, and that there will be greater peace, closer fellowship and fuller life with in the Church, and also renewed eagerness and power for the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ. It hopes that it maybe the leaven of unity in the life of India, and that through it there may be a greater release of divine power for the fulfilment of God's purpose for His world".

Unity and witness go together. In the opinion of all, evangelism is a priority for the church and there is a general feeling that C.S.I. has maintained this emphasis. There is however the perception that C.S.I. is less committed to evangelism.

What is striking is a holistic understanding of evangelisation of majority of respondents. 80% of the respondents regard healing, liberation, wholeness and discipleship as part of evangelization. However, whether this has made any impact in the practice of evangelism is still a moot question. A kind of compartmentalism still persists. The emphasis on the solidarity with the suffering and poor as the unavoidable dimension of mission is yet to be crystallised. The struggle for justice has not become integral to mission.

The Church and Dalit Concerns

Members of the Commission feel that Church's solidarity with dalit struggle needs special emphasis. The Church in India has a dalit origin. It was the mass conversion of dalits who longed for freedom from the

clutches of caste oppression and for gaining self-dignity is the great heritage of the church. The church union negotiations have taken denominational division as the reality to be addressed but a more serious division of caste and casteism as a pernicious evil was not responded to. With the result that the church's theology and mission has failed to be informed of this reality. The plea is to recover the 'dalitness' of the Church.

Precise form in which it should be achieved is yet to be considered.

Mission and healing ministry

The Church has involved in healing ministry in many forms but primarily through the hospitals. However, a majority of the respondents could not articulate their understanding of healing ministry. Is it integral to the mission?

But a majority of respondents wanted 'care of the elderly' as a priority in the present day context. This is not surprising as the number of the older citizens who are left alone in our urban areas is increasing.

III. UNITY AND FORCES OF DIVISION

a) Denominational

One of the striking perceptions that come out of the investigation is that C.S.I. has been able to overcome denominational divisions with it. Members do not think themselves as ex-Anglicans, ex-Methodist or ex-Congregationalist. They belong to one church, although some of the traditions peculiar to a particular tradition sometimes persists.

b) Caste and Language

Other divisions like *caste, language and region* play as divisive forces. Overwhelming majority maintained that caste is not consistent with the christian Gospel. But they acknowledge that caste is not consistent with the christian Gospel. But they acknowledge that caste is a force to be reckoned with. For example, only 49% of the respondents favour inter-caste marriage among Christians but a majority feel that caste is not a factor that divides the Church. One cannot be

absolutely clear about it. The respondents are usually from congregations that have a homogenous background. For them divisions are caused by factors other than caste.

In the same way, language, according to the responses received, is not a major source for division in any levels-synod or diocese. Perhaps, the notion based on our impression that caste and linguistic differences are divisive should be carefully examined. On the one hand, these have become 'identity sources' and they are accepted as 'given realities'. People may have learned to live with them and work out strategies giving due regard to them. But, on the other hand, there are, as we have seen in the section on elections, other forces become the source of conflict like money and power. In other words, caste and linguistic differences *per se* are not so much a problem as the exploitation of them for gaining power and position. This is happening in our national life as well. A clearer understanding of this process is necessary.

IV. Nurture and Unity : Youth and women :

We have raised questions about the Sunday School and other programmes of nurture. But many didn't care to comment on them. Is this indicative of an apathy towards it? Perhaps, the consultations with youth have brought out some pertinent observations. It is a sad reckoning that the undergirding Biblical/theological foundation that was responsible for the formation of C.S.I. as a 'uniting church' is hardly known to the present generation especially the youth. There has been no concerted effort towards that end. The C.S.I.'s formation, its growth, its role in mission in a pluralistic society have hardly been taught systematically.

There is generally a feeling that the importance of Christian nurturing of children and youth does not receive serious attention. In a highly competitive society, where ethics and moral values are being eroded,

one needs a stronger and well-planned teaching programmes. One avenue now open to the church is confirmation classes, but youth point out that it is taken 'too casually' and it has degenerated into a ritual.

Besides these youth had raised questions about the practice of elections and expressed their concern that they keep good talents away from the church. They have also made sharp comments about the tendency to become 'ritualistic' in worship and liturgy and about ineffective form of communication. Several of the youth are proud to be members of the C.S.I. and they want to see a church that goes forward in unity and witness. Dr. George Joseph who conducted the interviews on behalf of the Commission concludes his report with this observation. "It is my firm conviction that the stage is set for a greater, meaningful involvement of these young disciples in the life and witness of the church today, and who necessarily, have to be brought back to the main stream".

Women's Concerns

The Commission devoted special attention to the concerns of women in one of its consultations. The general perception is that although in some areas like ordination of women, C.S.I. has taken a lead, women's participation in the decision making process at all levels is minimal. It was pointed out that during the Jubilee celebrations women were conspicuously absent in the centre stage although they in large numbers were there as spectators. Questions were also asked who represents women and how they are elected? Women's fellowships in the churches do not attract the participation of young and dynamic women partly because the activities of fellowships are on the traditional lines. How to link with women's struggle against all forms of violence committed to them? Can new links be forged with them and the women's movements which struggle for their rights and freedom? Has the church exploited the

potential of women for enhancing its ministry? Again a serious reflection is called for in this area.

V. CONTINUING EXPERIENCES OF UNITY :

It is often pointed out that in 1947 we did not start a new denomination but a new movement for unity. One of the expressive mandates given to the C.S.I. is to commit to the visible unity and to enter into negotiation with other churches. A joint council with CNI and Mar Thoma Church was formed. But the general perception is that the movement for unity is not pursued with any vigour and that members are largely indifferent to it. This perception is confirmed by our investigation. Except for some isolated joint worship in certain areas, there is no serious encounter between people from other traditions. Some even feel that they have to face difficulties in relating with other traditions. We have no clear idea about the nature of difficulties. It could be prejudice, misunderstanding, fears and suspicions. In any case one may come to the conclusion that C.S.I. is not initiating any Church unity movement. With regard to the Church's commitment to wider ecumenism, i.e. relationship or dialogue with people of other faiths, participation in secular movement also one is disappointed. In other words the founding vision of CSI and the mandate given to it is forgotten. Serious attention should be given to this 'amnesia' concerning ecumenism!

VI. IMAGE OF C.S.I.

To a general question asking people to indicate whether they are ashamed, concerned, satisfied or proud about CSI some of the members of the Commission were not happy with this formulation. They feared if an overwhelming number say 'ashamed' it would be a disgrace. But it happens that only an insignificant minority said they were ashamed, but many are concerned. A significant group are proud of their C.S.I. membership.

In this section we may consider perspective from our partners overseas. In fact, there is an intense interest in the life of the C.S.I. by our partner churches. They continue to contribute to the development programmes of our Church. But they ask, is there today 'a drive for wider union with other Christians? Is CSI still a uniting Church? In this connection questions are asked about organizing C.S.I. congregations in USA and Gulf countries. They also ask, does C.S.I. have too many outside relations with world confessional bodies, continental co-operation, with Church Associations and development agencies? Does this prevent the CSI again from becoming a uniting Church? The relation between partner churches and their agencies have not been discussed by the commission. We raise this as a concern to be pursued.

Finally, an open ended question asking respondents to give suggestion for improving the life of the C.S.I. was raised. Many responses were given such as "wipe out corruption, bring electoral reforms, treat everybody equal, keep politics away."

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the forgoing report, it is evident we are raising more questions than giving definite answers. The Commission has not given full attention to the various concerns raised in the study and formulated its recommendations. Moreover, it is the view of the Commission that the whole church, at every level, should be involved in this process of evaluation. Therefore, the following may be taken as tentative and they are by no means exhaustive.

1. *Considering worship as a moment and expression of unity and affirming the richness and beauty of CSI liturgy, we recommend that due attention be paid to incorporate more indigenous and regional elements into it. A process of study*

may be evolved by which congregations are consulted in this revision of liturgy.

2. *Regular workshops be conducted on pastoral visits and preaching with a view to evolve new patterns of them that are relevant to rural and urban congregations.*

3. *Special attention be given to pastoral care in rural dalit congregations.*

4. *Lay training programme be deepened at every level and special attention be given to help laity take their secular vocation as a way of witnessing to the kingdom.*

5. *The role of episcopacy in CSI be studied in depth seeking ways for evolving a pastorally oriented bishopric.*

6. *Diocesan administration be restructured by which greater devolution of power is possible e.g. By giving area chairman more powers and responsibilities.*

7. *We agree with the previous Commission's recommendation that the term of synod and diocesan officers (other than the Bishop) be for two terms.*

8. *While we agree that in a democratic process elections cannot be avoided, all steps be taken to avoid conflicts and unhealthy practices such as the use of money, indecent propaganda. To ensure a smooth and participatory form of elections we suggest the following consideration :*

a) *the feasibility of introducing the system of proportional or preferential voting by which all the groups will be represented in the electoral bodies. (This method is followed in the election of Legislative Council and statutory bodies like University Senate).*

b) *A code of conduct clearly stipulating the practices that are to be avoided and appoint vigilance committees to ensure the implementation of the code.*

c) *Appointing lay committees consisting of members from other dioceses (this may need constitutional amendments, if accepted).*

d) *Institute arbitration boards to consider and act on complaints.*

9. *We urge a stronger commitment by the church to dalit concerns. Specific injustices like dalit atrocities, system of bonded labour that prevail in society in which some of our own members are victims, should receive immediate attention. We recommend a special cell/desk in the Synod to deal with such situations that need quick and effective action.*

10. *To ensure greater participation of women, A strict adherence to the implementation of the mandate given earlier, i.e. 25% of women in Synod and other elected bodies be called for.*

11. *We endorse the demand by both women and youth for separate electorate to elect their own representatives to all the decision-making bodies.*

12. *Ministry to youth and children should receive urgent attention in the C.S.I. For this we recommend that the confirmation classes should be an occasion for imparting relevant form of instruction to the youth. Special effort be made to train pastors in teaching the youth.*

13. *We recommend that children be allowed to participate in the holy communion. There is no theological justification to exclude them from receiving the means of grace as they are already baptised. Confirmation as a requirement for receiving communion is based on an unsound theology.*

14. *We need to evolve a comprehensive policy in regard to educational work. Redefining its objective in present context and address specific needs :*

a) *Primary education is neglected in many rural areas even today and the church should address this issue.*

b) *An orientation of teachers and the staff to the concerns of inculcating values necessary for building a just and equitable community should be a priority.*

c) Counselling services among the Colleges and schools be introduced to deal with situations of conflict and tension and even psychological trauma.

15. In the area of healing ministry, there is need for a deeper understanding of the integral relation between healing and mission. One of the priorities of healing ministry be the care of the elderly. We recommend that at the diocesan levels this may be attempted.

16. For greater communication and integration between different segments we recommend the following:

a) regional synods, free of electoral exercise, could meet once in two years to take steps for ministry and mission in the given region.

b) At the Synod level facilities for simultaneous translations be

created. The 'Tyranny of English' prevents a better communication among the delegates. All documents - reports, addresses, resolutions - of the Synod be translated into regional languages.

17. Having noted the general decline in the C.S.I's commitment to growing unity among denominations, we recommend that a special effort be made to analyze the causes of it and plan a strategy along with other denominations and NCCI. It is also recommended that CSI with other denominations start a centre for church unity.

18. We recommend that the present commission be asked to continue its work to complete the work and to evolve a process by which excerpts of the report and the recommendations be the subject of congregational study and

reflection.

"Our God given role is fundamentally that of being keepers and interpreters of the Gospel Tradition.

The real agents for change are the Poor in Spirit. If we achieve such a humble self understanding and start giving expression to that almost all the problems we face will disappear. But ofcourse a lot of work needs to be done. Starting with Sunday School, young, Adults and confirmation courses going upto theological education and continuing education for the pastors."

Three focal images in the N.T. that shape Christian discipleship are **community, the Cross and New creation**. They provide us with memory and vision, a motive for action and hope. Review is a way to recapture this process.

Responses to this article from our esteemed readers are most welcome and they may kindly be sent to the Editor, The South India Churchman to be forwarded to Dr. K.C. Abraham.

The Magazine of the Church of South India.

The South India CHURCHMAN

ADVERTISEMENT TARIFF

Back Cover	Rs.1,200 p.m. per insertion
Full Page	Rs. 750 per insertion
Half Page	Rs. 400 per insertion
Quarter Page	Rs. 200 per insertion
Minimum	Rs. 150 per insertion

RATES OF SUBSCRIPTION PER ANNUM

Subscription... Rs.50.00

Single copy ... Rs. 5.00

SUBSCRIPTION OVERSEAS

		Sea Mail	Air Mail
U.S.A.	...	\$ 15.00	\$ 20.00
U.K.	...	£ 10.00	£ 15.00
Australia	...	\$ 15.00	\$ 25.00
New Zealand	...	\$ 15.00	\$ 25.00

Statement of ownership and other particulars about The South India Churchman.

1. Place of Publication : A.V.M. Enterprises
7/3, First Street,
Bakthavatchalam Colony,
Vadapalani,
Chennai-600 026.
2. Periodicity of its publication : Monthly
3. Printer's Name : Mr. M. Lawrence Peter
(Whether citizen of India?) : Indian
(If foreigner, state the country of origin : ...
Address : 7/3, First Street,
Bakthavatchalam Colony,
Vadapalani,
Chennai - 600 026.
4. Publisher's Name : Rev. Govada Dyvasirvadam
(Whether citizen of India) : Indian
Address : CSI Centre, 5, Whites Road,
Royapettah,
Chennai-600 014.
5. Editor's Name : Rev. C.V. Theodore
(Whether citizen of India?) : Indian
Address : CSI Centre, 5, Whites Road,
Royapettah,
Chennai-600 014.
6. Names and addresses of : Owned by the Synod of the
Individuals who own the Church of South India.
Newspaper and partners No partners or shareholders.
or shareholders holding more than one percent of the total capital

I, Rev. Govada Dyvasirvadam hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Sd/- Govada Dyvasirvadam
Signature of Publisher

Dated : March 1998



PEOPLE GROWERS (All who teach and care for people) TRAINED

YES! the reasonable rates include food, stay and training at our Coonoor campus.

Come for the value of the training

Course Titles	Dates	Venue
Integrated Christian Education	April 27 - May 7	Coonoor
Advanced Christian Education	May 11 - May 21	Coonoor

for
Rs. 80
a day **YES** !

YES! the scenery is lovely, the air fragrant, and the hillside colourful, in cool and misty Coonoor.

Come for empowering through Spirit-led training

by
able
faculty **YES** !

YES! participants from churches all over India make learning through fellowship and fun a rich experience.

Come to be enriched through participative training

at a
hill
resort **YES** !

YES! the visiting and ISSU faculty are committed, qualified and experienced, with a heart to equip others for ministry.
Come for Christ-centred training

a
unique
blend **YES** !

Faculty with national and international experience

bring a refreshing blend

from the fields of education, communication counselling, and theology

to build people growers !

For details, course descriptions and registration fees

Write or Call



ST. ANDREW CENTRE
FOR HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND COUNSELLING
of the
INDIA SUNDAY SCHOOL UNION

0423 - 34175

ORANGE GROVE ROAD, COONOR - 643 101, NILGIRIS, TAMIL NADU

